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CIA, OSR

16 December 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR:

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SUBJECT : OSR Review [redacted] Study on Soviet Weaknesses

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1. We have reviewed [redacted] study on the Exploitation of Soviet Weaknesses and have some general impressions and more specific comments to pass on. The study correctly points out that the Soviets are not "ten feet tall", but would suffer from the same sort of problems that would plague any army trying to accomplish the rather ambitious missions the Soviets appear to have set for themselves. While many of these weaknesses are common to NATO forces as well, most are associated uniquely with offensive operations on which the Soviets rely primarily. Certainly some of the weaknesses cited could be exploited by NATO commanders, but it should be considered that Soviet writings show an awareness of the weaknesses in their operational doctrine and reflect efforts which would be taken to prevent NATO from capitalizing on them. Moreover, the recognition of opportunities is only the first part of the problem; NATO commanders must also have sufficient uncommitted forces to respond to such opportunities in a timely manner when they arise.

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2. Our analysts also had a number of comments which are tied to specific references in the study.

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[redacted] Soviet operational doctrine accepts the concept that the flanks of many advancing units will be exposed. This would more accurately be described as a carefully considered tradeoff than a hidden weakness. If possible, attacks certainly should be made on exposed enemy flanks, but it should

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be recognized that such attacks require a strong reserve and that Soviet doctrine has plans for dealing with attacks on the flanks of advancing units. Second echelon and reserve units would be responsible for dealing with both bypassed units and units which attack into unprotected flanks of first echelon units. The Soviets consider that exposed flanks will be most common when they are in the exploitation phase of an offensive when they would have already caused a major disruption of the enemy's force and possibly have already engaged or isolated those enemy forces which would have to make these flank attacks.

X1 [ ] Concentrating forces before a main attack is necessary for any army. Soviet doctrinal writings certainly recognize this problem and call for limiting the resulting exposure to enemy nuclear or conventional fire to an absolute minimum by concentrating rapidly from the march opposite the point of attack. Again, this is a weakness unique to the offense, but exploitation requires responsive intelligence and a rapid reaction capability.

X1 [ ] We don't anticipate that Soviet second echelon units would "pass through" first echelon units. Soviet doctrine calls for the second echelon to renew the assault on a different axis or, if the second echelon is exploiting a gap created by the first echelon, the first echelon forces would move aside to protect the flanks of the exploitation force.

X1 [ ] If the Soviets were achieving the rates cited in the study, resistance would not be intense and logistics requirements--particularly for ammunition--would be reduced. There is no evidence that the structure of the Soviet logistics system would pose any unusual constraints on Soviet rates of advance beyond those associated with any rapidly advancing army. If Soviet forces were sustaining a rate of advance beyond what their logistics system could support, NATO for all practical purposes would have already been defeated.

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X1 [REDACTED] It is doubtful that Soviet tanks would regularly operate without infantry support in areas where antitank defenses were present and effective. While individual tanks or small isolated units certainly will be subject to ambush by missile-armed tank killer teams, we do not believe these ambushes would pose a significant threat to Soviet strategy.

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X1 [REDACTED] There is no evidence that the Soviet army overall is more logistically constrained for sustained operations than NATO armies. While individual Soviet units may not be capable of conducting sustained combat operations as long as comparable NATO units, they are intended to be replaced more frequently than are NATO units. It is true that Soviet strategy stresses the short, fast

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moving campaign, but there is no reason to believe that Soviet logistics could not support larger operations should they prove necessary.

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